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Terrorists say they executed U.S. hostage

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BEIRUT — The pro-Iranian terrorist group Islamic Jihad said this morning it had executed William Buckley, a kidnapped U.S. diplomat, in retaliation for alleged American involvement in the Israeli air raid on Tunis.

"We declare a revenge for the blood of martyrs by sentencing to death the agent of the CIA in the Middle East and the head of the Lebanon station and the first political adviser of the American Embassy in Lebanon, spy William Buckley," said a statement from the Shi'ite terror group.

The communique was delivered to the Arabic-language daily newspaper An Nahar, which has received statements from Islamic Jihad in the past that proved authentic. The type-written statement was accompanied by a color Polaroid picture of Mr. Buckley alive, showing him grimaced, bespectacled and bearded.

[In Washington last night, White House spokesman Larry Speakes said U.S. officials had no independent confirmation of Mr. Buckley's death.]

Mr. Buckley, 57, the longest-held of six American hostages in Lebanon, was kidnapped outside his apartment in West Beirut in March 1984. If the announcement of his execution proves correct, it will be the first time a U.S. citizen kidnapped in Beirut has been murdered in Lebanon.

The announcement came less than 48 hours after the murder of one of the four kidnapped Soviet officials in Beirut.

Islamic Jihad said the execution was in retaliation for U.S. involvement in Tuesday's Israeli air raid on Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization headquarters in Tunis.

"This operation [the Israeli raid] was carried out according to a joint American and Israeli plan and the American warships in the Mediterranean supplied the Israelis with fuel," the lengthy communique claimed.

In Tunis itself yesterday, a PLO

official charged he had proof the United States aided Israeli warplanes in their raid on the PLO headquarters. Similar charges were also made in the United Nations yesterday, during the second day of a debate called by Tunisia to urge the council to condemn Tuesday's Israeli raid.

U.S. officials have firmly denied any involvement in the raid or any advance knowledge of it. Israel says the eight U.S.-made F-15 fighters used in the attack were refueled twice in flight by Israeli tanker planes.

Israel said it bombed the PLO headquarters in retaliation for the killing of three Israelis in Larnaca, Cyprus, last week.

At least 73 people were killed in the attack, and more than 100 injured.

In its statement, Islamic Jihad said "We will dedicate his [Mr. Buckley's] body to the families of Moslem and Tunisian martyrs who were killed in this raid."

"We are not against the American people," the statement said. "We released lately the Rev. Benjamin Weir as a proof. But we are against American policy and its representatives, and against spies who train criminals and create anarchy to carry out massacres against Moslems."

"We warn the American and Israeli governments from carrying out any retaliation because they will pay dearly in Lebanon, Washington and the world, and the arm of our strugglers can reach the violators," said the statement.

Mr. Buckley, a native of Medford, Mass., arrived in Beirut in September 1983 on his first assignment abroad for the State Department and served as first secretary in the political section of the U.S. Embassy here. At 8 a.m. on March 16, 1984, according to the concierge at his apartment building, Mr. Buckley got into his car to drive to work when a

Renault with three gunmen in it drove up and blocked his way.

A second car with two more gunmen appeared down the street. Men from the first car forced Mr. Buckley into their Renault, then sped off.

Mr. Buckley was not heard from again until last January, when a British news agency obtained a videotape made by his captors.

"I am well, and my friends Benjamin Weir and Jeremy Levin are also well," Mr. Buckley said in the tape. "We ask that our government take action for our release quickly."

Mr. Levin escaped his captors in February; Mr. Weir was released in mid-September. Both men said they had no contact with Mr. Buckley.

Islamic Jihad, which claims to be

holding the other American hostages in Beirut, has demanded the release of 17 Shi'ites.

The group, whose name means "Holy War," is believed to be a loosely connected network of Shi'ite Moslems linked to Iran's fundamentalist, anti-American regime.

Mr. Weir, 61, a Presbyterian minister and a native of Berkeley, Calif., who had lived in Lebanon for about 32 years, was freed by Islamic Jihad last month.

He held a news conference Sept. 18 in Washington, where he said his captors had threatened to kill the remaining hostages or kidnap more Americans unless the Reagan administration met their demands.

In addition to the Americans, 11

other foreigners — French, British and Soviet citizens — have been kidnapped and are believed being held in Lebanon.

The other missing Americans are Peter Kilburn, 60, a librarian at the American University of Beirut, who did not report for work Dec. 3, 1984; the Rev. Martin Lawrence Jenco, 50, a Roman Catholic priest kidnapped Jan. 8, 1985; and Terry A. Anderson, 37, chief Middle East correspondent for The Associated Press, kidnapped on March 16, 1985; David Jacobsen, 54, administrator of the American University of Beirut hospital, kidnapped May 28, 1985; and Thomas Sutherland, 54, acting dean of agriculture at the university, abducted June 9, 1985.